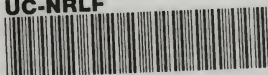


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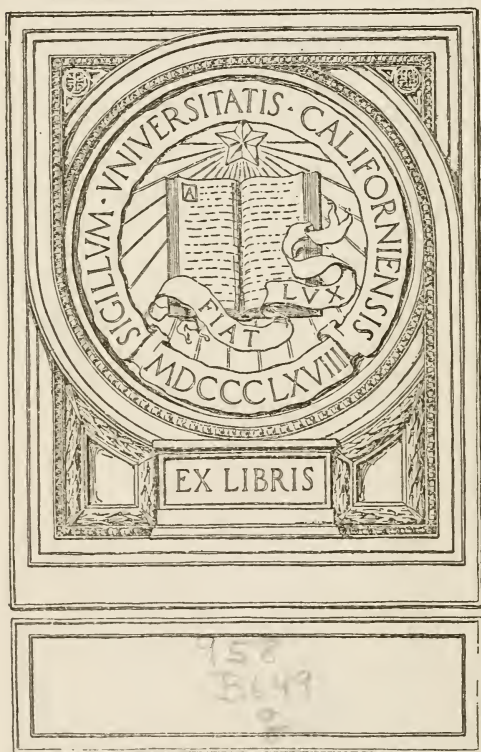


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QUESTS

SYLVIA H. BLISS

ALUMNVS BOOK FVND



QUESTS

POEMS IN PROSE

BY

SYLVIA HORTENSE BLISS

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My Sister Alice
1920

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QUESTS

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I will disclose to those who have not seen, the beauty of the world.

I will not strive to enhance the beauty by fine phrases, nor hide it under a covering of words.

I will stand aside that I may not be in the way of a tree and that my shadow may not fall upon a flower.

I will be silent while the thrush sings and the young leaves rustle in the wind.

I will hide my little light that men may not turn from the sunlight nor withdraw their gaze from the night sky.

I will be as one who stands humbly at the portal to give entrance to those who seek the beauty of the world.

I open doors before you. You may pass through or turn away, as you will.

There are doors which I will open that shall never close. You will see the open doors and before you are aware you will have passed through.

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I brought to them a flower and they gave me thanks. I brought to them a little poem and they gave me praise.

I brought to them a truth and they were silent. I could not know if they received it.

I

QUESTS OF DAY AND NIGHT

QUESTS OF DAY AND NIGHT

FROM the east cometh the day. Again it has circled the earth and looked upon all lands and all peoples.

It has seen the enterprises and tasks of men and is not weary. It has beheld the injustice and oppression of men and is not cast down. It has passed over degradation and foulness and is not itself defiled.

The day has moved on the face of deep waters and brings the gleam of waves and the fresh breeze of the sea. It has passed over vast forests and caught the fragrance of the fir tree and the morning song of birds. It has shone upon the wise and strong, the true and undefiled of earth, and with the dawning light brings the great gift of hope.

From the east cometh the day.

FROM the east cometh the night. It follows the day as a shadow.

All that the pride and shame of man hide from the day is known to the night.

The moan of him who is brave and silent in the light is heard by her in the darkness, and the

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anguished face of him who smiles by day is sheltered upon her deep breast.

The wounds and sickness of man are open to her gaze, and the temptation and secret guilt of man she covers.

Still is the night not over-burdened nor her mercy consumed. Continually she receives the weary and the troubled soul.

From the east cometh the night.

How shall one know the night if he ventures forth only in the day? How shall one become acquainted with darkness if he dwells continually in the light?

The day is the gift of the sun. From whence cometh the night?

Night, thou art nearer than the day. With tenderness thou enfoldest me and impartest to me thy secret thoughts.

The thoughts of the day are simple and are known unto men; thy thoughts are mysterious and great. Thou knowest all that is to come.

The darkness was before the light and the night before the day.

The day is but a moment of the eternal night. It is a flower upon the breast of darkness.

The white flower of day shall fade and I will lay my head where it has died, upon the kind and tender breast of night.

THE day has vanished. I will stand still and let the night flow into my soul.

I will not flee from the night; I will not hasten to roofed enclosures and bright lights.

My soul needs the night, the cool, enfolding, unifying night. The day breaks my soul in a thousand pieces; they lie in a heap, dusty and dimmed by the contacts of the world. Each fragment has a separate life and is rebel against the whole. There is no leader; there is no rest.

In the west long mountains lie, dusky, purple-shadowed, against the deepening orange of the sky. So clear the air, a single leaf, upblown, might show its etched shape athwart the flame. High in the vault red Mars, and higher still, Arcturus, take our snug earth within their cognizance.

Night advances, quenching the sunset's fire, silencing the birds, unlocking scents of balsam and of fern. A flood of cool air flows from the wide realm of mystery beyond the east. Darkness blots out form and color. Night has come.

I will not flee. I will stand still and the night will flow into my soul,—the cool, enfolding, unifying night.

I WILL descend to the Valley of Sleep which lies between the hills of Evening and of Morning.

I will cast off the trappings of the day, for unclothed in body and mind must I enter the Valley of Sleep.

The cool air uprushes from the dark gulf and extinguishes the torch of my understanding which I would fain carry with me to light the way. Disarmed in body and mind must I enter the Valley of Sleep; its fastnesses are not to be taken by force and its mysteries are not open to the understanding.

The depth of the Valley of Sleep is greater than the height of the hills of Evening and of Morning. It is greater than the height of the Mount of Day; no man knoweth its extent. It is deeper than the foundations of the world, and the mind of man can not compass it.

Into the Valley of Sleep enter the ten thousand thousands of earth. Still is its space not filled nor its boundaries strained. No man is in the way of another; there is room for the solitude of each.

My soul journeys farther than my body in the Valley of Sleep. Unafraid it ventures into the immensity and returns with no tidings of its wanderings. My mind drops hints of its fantasies and dreams as it ascends the Hill of Morning, but my soul keeps its own counsel.

I depart from my friends and journey far from my habitation, but never more than a day's journey am I from the Valley of Sleep which lies between the hills of Evening and of Morning.

THE shadow of one day shall not fall upon another day.

Between them is the gentle night which divides the days and shuts the door that yesterday may not pass into today.

The pain of yesterday shall not enter the domain of today nor the sorrow of yesterday pass its boundaries.

The loss of yesterday shall not darken the new day nor the sin of yesterday cloud its morning.

But for the joy of yesterday there is the open door and the gentle night gives entrance to hope.

AT night I was weary and disheartened for I heard men say, There is nothing new under the sun, and we spend our years as a tale that is told.

Other voices spoke to me in my sleep, and I arose to a day as new as the first day of the world.

The ancient tale of life was rife with meaning and its last word was one of hope.

LONG shadows lie across my path. They are not shadows of past joys and sweet companion-

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ships. They are not shadows of the evening hour, which will lengthen, merge in darkness and prevail.

They are shadows of the morning and fall westward. The dew on the grass glistens in the light of the rising sun and the shadows fade and vanish as the great day advances.

I LEANED from my window that my eyes and my soul might see far into the darkness of the night.

I saw only the light from my window on the dark trees, and in the midst of the light the shadow of myself.

I AWOKE this morning with a sweet song in my heart. I could not understand the song for it was a song of joy, and there was no joy in my life. The years stretched bleak and difficult before me.

As I listened to the low singing I knew it was the lingering music of the hope which died yesterday in my heart.

A MULTITUDE of thoughts rush by me in the darkness, and numberless words pass swiftly,

leaving no trace. I am cast down, and sorrowful with sense of loss.

Then am I spoken to from the silence:—Since the beginning of the world have thoughts been born and words multiplied. As the leaves of a great forest, so are thoughts, and as grains of sand, so is the number of words.

Thy task is not that of increasing thoughts nor of multiplying words. Thy thoughts shall be simple and thy words few. Thou shalt see that from which thoughts spring and that which giveth rise to words.

Regret not the thoughts that vanish and the words which pass swiftly. Thou shalt see that which abides.

Do we hunger that we may be filled, and thirst that our thirst may be quenched?

Do we seek that we may find, and climb that we may reach the height? Do we question that we may be answered, and strive that we may attain?

Is the goal of longing, satisfaction, and of aspiration, content? Is the end of prayer, reception, and of love, possession?

A thirst that is quenched is a dead thirst, and he who is content no longer aspires.

Feed me with hunger and satisfy me with longing.

QUESTS

Make not an end of striving in my life. Let
not love and hope die in my heart.

WHERE is youth? Where is age?

Is a little child young, and the rocky face of a
mountain, old? Is a wise man young, and the
earth upon which he walks of great age?

The Pyramids are more ancient than the
Pyrenees, and the Parthenon than the Rock of
Gibraltar. Rome was before the Alps, and in
the presence of the nations of the world Niagara
is as the rain of yesterday.

The dust of the earth has come but a little
way and its journey is within imagined time.

The spirit of man has come from a great
distance and been long on the way. It gained
knowledge before the foundation of the world,
and wisdom when the stars were yet unborn.

All that it hath is not now manifest.

THE concerns of man are not the only concerns
of earth.

There are the concerns of the crows, moving
with harsh cries across the sky, and the concerns
of the thrushes and sparrows, singing among the
young leaves.

QUESTS OF DAY AND NIGHT

There is the concern of the spider, drawing her silk threads from twig to twig, and the concern of the moth whose span of life is but a day.

There are the concerns of tiny, winged creatures and of little crawling worms, of frogs in the pools and borers in the trees, of swift, small animals and of great creatures of stealth and strength.

There is the business of grass and tree, fern and moss, mushroom and lichen, and under all skies the beautiful business of the flowers.

Among men, and where man is not, go on the concerns of the other creatures of the world.

THE moth has come too near the flame and lies quiet, with scorched wings.

It is a little thing—the death of a moth; merely the close of one of numberless brief lives. The moth will not be missed nor its death noticed.

It is a strange thing—the death of a moth. It is more than the ending of a few hours' life.

The moth has missed its bridal, and a stream of life from a past more far than man can reckon or conceive, has ceased to flow.

The moth lies quiet, with scorched wings, while the flame burns brightly.

As I lie on the grass a little creature crawls upon my hand.

It is so small and weak it becomes entangled among the hairs of my hand. The hairs are as fallen trees impeding its progress.

I do not know the name of the little creature nor its destiny, but I will help it to pass the barriers.

I was once lost in a great wood where fallen trees impeded my way.

THE taste of the day is bitter in my mouth. The walls of the house have enclosed me and the hands of my spirit were not able to reach to the outer air.

I have been caught on the wheel of tasks which repeat themselves endlessly for each generation, and my soul was not for an instant free to pursue the way which turns not upon itself, but moves ever forward.

The day is as one that is lost.

A thing so small as a hand before my face hides from me the great sun.

A thing smaller than my hand hides from my spirit the great light of life.

How may I escape from the shadow of little things?

As at the sound of a clear-toned bell my soul has awakened and my spirit moves swiftly.

My soul is not hindered nor my spirit detained. They are not bound by the wheel of tasks which repeat themselves endlessly, but are free to pursue the way which turns not upon itself.

LONG I sent messengers of fear before me. Dread marked the path and apprehension prepared the way.

According to the messengers I sent was the path which I traveled.

One day hope escaped and ran before me; confidence followed, and the expectation of great good.

The path I found was new and beautiful, for according to the messengers I sent was the way I was to travel.

Before me go now winged messengers of the spirit. Far in advance they fly, making ready the path. Dim shapes of fear and dread are slain as they pass, and for apprehension there is no place.

The path before me is ever new and beautiful, for according to the messengers I send is the way which I travel.

THE fields of earth are drenched with blood. They will be fertile in coming years from the

sowing of human flesh. Peace has become a memory, and the sky is darkened by the rising of sad thoughts.

Will the spring flowers come as of old, when the sky was clear and men heard not the roar of battle?

The spring flowers have come. They have risen as delicate fancies in a mind long vexed by grave and dreary thoughts. They have come as tender impulses in a heart long filled with hatred and violence.

Their faint breath is stronger than the smoke of battle, and their beauty more potent than force of arms.

War to the flowers of spring is but the passing of a cloud in the clear sky of a long day.

II

THE QUEST OF NATURE

THE QUEST OF NATURE

THE snowy cloak of the world is unclasped and waits, loosened and ready to fall from the fields and woods.

The south-sloping hills are bare; soon the warm tenderness of the sun will have wrought in them the marvel of life, and blades of grass and folded leaves of buttercup will break forth from the quickened earth.

The buds of the trees cast off their winter shields and give their young hearts to the sun. Long have they waited that they may unfold to bright and shimmering leaves.

Slowly the earth yields to the wooing of the returning sun.

THE earth has hidden herself from her lover. Again is she covered with a garment of white; she denies herself to the sun.

The earth is cold. A strong, fierce wind lifts the snow in sheets of white and wavering flame. Sprouting grass and buttercup are covered and the buds of the trees shrink from the icy touch. Birds hide themselves and are still.

The wind withdraws itself; it runs along far hills and sinks in silence. The sun thrusts

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warm rays through the clouds and the earth answers with a smile.

She has relented. Her heart thrills. From a tall tree a bluebird sends upward its soft song.

THE earth is bare. She has no defense and no hiding-place from the sun; glorious is her yielding.

Green runs over her fields as a crimson flush over the cheek of a woman whose heart is stirred.

By warm showers is the earth renewed. The rain is as quiet weeping which leaves the heart tender and pure, and prepared for great joy.

Little flowers spring up as thoughts which can not be repressed. Where snow first left the wood, hepaticas push upward through dead leaves, and where the sandy hill-side nears the stream, arbutus hides among the evergreens.

The blossoming of the trees, when poplars hang out fringe of gray and maples are a cloud of red, is a dawning smile, and when the shining leaves burst forth I hear the first soft laughter of the earth.

THE evergreens have not awakened. They rest serene in pride of unshed leaves and the drowsiness of autumn lingers in their branches.

Arbutus opens at their foot and ferns uncoil within their shadow. Young leaves of birch and poplar beckon, and tall maples flush with the joy of May.

Still are the evergreens unmoved.

Then the shad bush lays its thin leaves and fair white flowers against the pine's dark cloud, and the pine wakes at the caress. Its pale shoots rise toward the sky, and all the hemlocks and the firs are tipped with tender green.

THE willow with tassels of gold, soft and fragrant, the willow with tassels of silver-green, stiff and sweet,—they dwell apart.

The width of a road divides them, and the dense greenness of a fir hides each from the other's sight.

My lord willow with the golden blossoms, my lady willow with sweet maiden flowers—I would know the bond uniting you.

Rooted in earth, the utmost reaching of your lithe boughs vain, is each yet conscious of the other as you are not of maple and of fir?

Where is your love, my lord? Diffused through root and branch, and ungrown, folded leaves,—or in each tiny flower? Is it one message or a hundred that the bee, laden with pollen, bears to the bush beyond the fir?

QUESTS

My lady willow, where is hidden your love?
When the bee alights upon your tasseled boughs,
are there a hundred hearts, or one, whose longings
still at the soft touch of love?

As a troop of dancers in fluttering robes of green,
come the leaves.

They throng the wood and sweep through the
valley; they climb the hills and crowd upon the
winding road.

Their garments glisten in the sun and they
lightly sway to music which I can not hear.

They hide the branches of the trees and close
the windows of the forest that I may not see
within.

I enter the forest and all the paths are cur-
tained and all the vistas veiled with fresh and
tremulous leaves.

MARVELOUS and to be praised are the stars in
the night sky. The span of their life is in un-
reckoned time and the goal to which they move
out-distances man's thought.

More marvelous are the leaves of a tree which
come each spring from tiny folded buds.

A thousand and a thousand forms of green,
woven of tissue that no man can make; thin,
serrate-edged, patterned unerringly, living for

beauty and as playthings for the wind, yet toiling all their short lives through that they may add their tribute to the great tree's growth, dying in beauty and in glory that they have not known,—

I praise the marvel and the mystery of leaves.

WHERE have been hidden the shape of the ferns and the pattern of the leaves? Where were stored the plan of the columbine and the color of the rose?

Birds return from the south, but the flowers are born each year. The green of the trees runs into molds I can not see, and the whiteness of the anemone gathers in pure stars.

Is the pattern of a fern in its root, and the tint of a flower in its seed?

The earth has held each in remembrance, and spring awakens her thoughts.

How many springs have the trees sent out their leaves? How many springs has the wind-flower unfolded its whiteness in the wood, and the fern broken earth with its coiled fronds?

In those countless springs before man watched, were the edges of the leaves as finely cut? Were the petals of the flower as purely white? Did ferns uncoil their fronds with such slow grace?

QUESTS

Before eyes saw did Nature work with tool
as delicate and art as fine?

Was there no slighting in the finish of a leaf
or tinting of a flower, before man came?

THE wood is a mist of green starred with white
flowers.

From sunny hollows nods the crimson trillium,
and in wide, vivid beds, the little oak fern lifts
its tender fronds.

A presence passes in the undergrowth, but
turn as swiftly as I may I see only the innocent,
wise faces of the flowers and feel the glad tremor
in the enlightened air.

HAVE the birds set a watch for the dawn?

When the blackness of night fades and mist
whitens in the long valley, a little voice breaks
the silence.

It has awakened a robin. It has awakened a
sparrow. The hermit thrush has heard.

One by one the birds slip into a sea of song
which rolls in sparkling waves above the damp
and silent earth.

The risen sun dispels the mist in the long valley,
and quiets the sea of song in field and wood.

Fragments of mist float away, and scattered songs are heard as waves of a receding ocean which break on far, out-lying rocks.

How long has been thy journey, little twin-flower, and from whence?

By what strange, devious pathway hast thou reached this mossy bed where field and forest meet?

Thy green vines lie at ease, and thy paired, rosy flowers are lifted with the careless grace of those who long have dwelt upon the land.

When this thy home was buried deep beneath the field of ice, where wert thou? When the glacier passed, didst thou then come, a traveler from the south?

And what wert thou before flowers dwelt on earth? Did thy sweet scent and dainty beauty lie imprisoned in some lowly form in that far time?

Has thy fair spirit kept, undoubtingly, through all the unreckoned time, a vision of this end?

ARE the trees disquieted and full of fear when the wind lifts to view the under-surfaces of their leaves?

The wind moves among the trees as the waters of an invisible stream. The branches gently rise

and fall upon long, slow waves; they bend near to breaking in a swift current. The waters of the wind play with a single leaf of a full tree and tease not the others.

The stream eddies among the trees and they sway to right and left. They return to their place and are caught again in the current. Little waves run over the tree-tops and lose themselves in quietness.

With strength and swiftness the stream flows from the north. It passes as a flood over the trees and they bend low under its flowing. They can not lift themselves till it is past.

The moon rises and the stream broadens to a quiet lake. The trees are still.

I DESCEND from sunny hills to the dusky swamp.

The air is moist, and heavy with the fragrance of deep moss and fern.

In the green pool a wide-mouthed frog with bronze-rimmed eyes, sits on a slimy log and waits for flies. A turtle slips beneath the scum.

They are primal things lingering on the earth.

Alders crowd upon the pool, and when rain is withheld the ground creeps outward.

When the pool shall at last be filled with the alder and the spruce, will the primal things vanish from the earth?

THE sun as it nears the western mountains, sinks in a sea of rippled white. The day darkens and the air grows chill. A bird begins its even song.

The white sea widens and overspreads the western sky. Will the sun emerge and once more touch the earth?

The sea of cloud passes and the sun, low as the mountain peaks, remembers the earth. Little pools gleam, and blades of grass glisten in the golden light.

Eastward-falling shadows have grown longer and the day is near its close.

The sea of rippled white has reached the east and covers the full moon. Will the moon emerge and once more touch the earth?

THE sky is deep and clear; but for the noon-day sun I could see a multitude of stars.

The wind brings from sun-warmed fields the sweetness of clover and the fragrance of wild berries and of ripening grass.

A bobolink flies low and scatters liquid notes above the waving grain.

When the wind is still and a white cloud veils the sun, I hear in far woods the thrush's hermit song.

GRAY dust lies soft and deep upon the winding road, and whitens the fresh green of wayside shrubs.

Heat hovers over parching fields, and the thin leaves of the jewel-weed droop wan and pale beneath the sun's long look.

The shadow of the wood comes forth to meet me and I am drawn within the shelter of dark trees.

The wood is cool and merciful. Long fronds of fragrant fern that have not known the sun's warm gaze, bend above moist, mossed rocks, and from the mire wild callas lift their snowy spathes among broad, shining leaves.

Within the wood is kept alive the memory of rain, till rain shall come.

THE rain ceased and the wind died. The song of the cricket filled the silence as if it had not ceased through the wind and the rain. It was the voice of silence.

I sought the cricket to learn the secret of its song. My scalpel and microscope revealed only the file and saw of its wing-covers; they did not disclose the secret of the cricket's song.

The wild orchid opened its fringed and purple blossom by the roadside and gave to me its mysterious fragrance. In return I rent its beauty

that I might discern the secret of its charm. In my hands remained but torn and blackened tissue, and the fragrance had fled.

Then a Voice saith: The secret of anything is not within itself. Continue thy search until the smallest atoms are open to thy view, yet shalt thou be as one who gazes into an empty chamber whose occupant has awakened and fled. The secret of the sunbeam is in the sun, and the secret of the wave is in the ocean and the wind. The secrets of the cricket and of the orchid are not within themselves. They are beyond.

I asked: Where shall I search? The Voice was silent. Then I wondered, Where is the secret of man if it is not within himself?

THE rising tide of life breaks upon earth in waves of green crested with foam of flowers.

There is no pause in the beating of waves upon the shore of earth. The tide mounts higher, and I wonder, When will the spring cease its coming that the summer may appear?

There is a day when a wave breaks farther from my feet and the brightness of its crest is dulled. The tide has turned.

In a moment that I did not know, the summer passed.

IF I fear the night I miss the secrets of the night.
I will go out quietly in the darkness.

QUESTS

The clouds are heavy and have hidden the stars. A bat slips past; an owl flies low and silently on heavy wings.

The black leaves stir in winds I can not feel, and little unseen creatures leave the path at my approach.

A pale moth seeks a white and fragrant flower, and tiny insects spin fine, humming threads of song.

I hush my thoughts to hear the whisper of the bending trees.

I SEEK the secrets of another night.

There is no cloud and all the star-hung space above the world is unobscured. The earth's deep silence merges in the deeper silence of the stars.

Far in the north a great light pales and flames, as if a strange new sun were forming from the chaos of the sky. The great light shifts and wavers as a melody on strings of vast and soundless harps.

The silence and the cold intensify; there is a moment when the tide of life in tender plants is checked.

Morning will find the meadow white with frost.

As messengers of grave import in a joyous assemblage, hiding their tidings until the revel

is past, so are the asters and the golden-rod among the flowers of spring.

Men's eyes are concerned with the wind-flower and the violet. They do not see, beyond their delicate, fair beauty, the stout and stable stalks of those that wait.

The spring blossoms wither and are gone. The flowers of summer unfold and fold again in fruit. The brightness of tree and grass grows dim.

Then, on banners of gold and purple, the tidings of the messengers flame forth, and men read their meaning.

INTO the waters of night are poured, from vials of bright light, the waters of the day.

The waters of night and day are mingled until the darkness is submerged in light.

Above the western mountains grows a sky of tender blue, flecked with the pink of morning cloud.

It is a sky of spring and underneath I look for the green of fresh, young forest leaves.

I see, amid dark firs, the orange-scarlet of the maple, and the amber-purple touched with crimson of the ash.

It is midday but there is no sun. The clouds are heavy and autumn rain is falling.

QUESTS

Into the dusk of my room a light shines. It is the light of an ash tree which stands just without. With the paling green of its leaves gold and amber are mingled.

The light of the tree is fainter than moonlight and softer than the light of stars. It pierces with the sharpness of a sword and envelops me with the tenderness of a cloud.

It is the light of the spirit of the tree which comes to me through the autumn rain.

It is the hour of sunset, but there is no brightness in the sky. Across the pall of gray, clouds of darker gray are drifting.

As I sit by the fire a sudden glow is in the room. From the window I can see no break in the dull sky; the glow is from far beyond. It penetrates the heavy clouds and lights them as with the memory of past sunsets. It is as a brief return to dying eyes of the life that has been.

The moment passes. I think I have dreamed of the light so dark are the clouds.

The sun has set.

THE clouds were heavy and the rain fell many days. When the sun shone out men said, How heavy have been the clouds and how long the rain.

THE QUEST OF NATURE

I said, Hear the roar of the full streams as they carry the water to the sea.

THE glory of the leaves is brought to earth.

The gold of elm, the shining brown of beech, the orange-scarlet of the maple, and the amber-purple of the ash, are all laid low.

Loosened by frost, flung high by winds as bright birds on the tides of air, dropped slowly through the warm, still days, descending in swift clouds when helped by rain, they reach at last their resting-place, merging their separate lives in drifts of somber brown.

Above the drifted leaves flit passing birds, their thin and silvery notes faint echoes of their joyous songs of spring.

It is late October; the aisles of the forest are open to my sight and between the naked boughs I see the sky.

The forest is a house from which the dwellers have fled, leaving open the doors that the passer-by may look within.

Men say, The beauty of the forest has vanished and its secrets are told; let us go away.

I go with them a little distance and return alone. The forest is cool and silent; above the fallen leaves the greenness of a hardy fern per-

sists. A pale moth flutters in the chill air and vanishes, uncertain of its fate.

Where is the beauty of the forest which has departed but shall return?

What are its secrets that have been told yet remain undisclosed?

THE full moon is rising above the woods beyond the swamp. It is a vast, pale eye overlooking the world.

The moon looks upon the bare branches of the maples and upon the dark twigs and white trunks of the birches. It shines upon the myriad yellow needles of the tamaracks and upon the aged pines.

The pale, cold eye looks into the swamp where have blossomed the rosy lady's slipper and the fragrant orchid of the bog, where the iris unfolded its blue petals and the cotton grass shook out its white tufts.

The cold eye sees only the covering of brown and gray beneath which the swamp sleeps with its store of dreams.

THOU preparest the world for Thy snow.

The flowers are done with blooming and their seeds await the winds of winter to scatter them

abroad. The leaves have finished their work and lie brown and sodden upon the faded grass.

The cricket has ceased its chirping and the frog has buried itself in the mud of the pool. The eggs of the butterfly are laid and the spider has spun for herself a shelter.

Thou hast banished the birds and given rest to the trees, and above Thy finished task of the year Thou wilt lay a covering of white.

I LEFT the shelter and comfort of my house and went out to meet the November day.

The breath of the day was from the south but there was in it no warmth or tenderness. The eyes of the day were heavy with a grief which finds no relief. The heart of the day was cold with a woe which bears no fruit save bitterness and desolation.

The mood of the day possessed me and I walked with bent head and unheeding eyes.

I had gone far when I felt upon my garments light touches as of gentle fingers. The breath of the day was warm and quiet about me and the woe of its heart had lightened.

From the eyes of the day were falling pure and beautiful tears which whitened the ground and the trees.

QUESTS

THERE are many graves by the roadside as I pass, and hands I can not see are busy covering the dead.

The clods which fill the graves are light and white, and their fall is with gentleness and peace.

There is no sorrow in my heart for the myriad dead, and no horror of those brown and withered forms.

I lift one in my hand. It is the body of a fern from which the greenness has passed away. I lay it with its fellows that the invisible hands may hide it from sight.

I AM alone in the cloister of the falling snow.

The walls that encompass me are miles in thickness, and though the roof touches my head it reaches to the clouds.

I am shut in from cities and from towns, from houses and from temples. I am separated from every living thing, from bird and animal and human kind. The sun and the moon and stars I can not see.

There is no door nor window and no opening to the sky. The walls scarce give me space to stand; they press softly against my body. The beams of the roof rest upon my head and when I bow in prayer they descend upon me.

I am alone in the cloister of the falling snow.

IN the fresh, light-lying snow are many trails.

There are trails that end at the foot of trees and trails that stop at the great rocks. Some lead to the woods and some are lost to sight in the wide fields.

There are tiny trails entering tunnels in the snow and short trails that are as if dropped from the clouds.

Wise folk know the trail of the fox and of the hare, of the squirrel and the mouse.

I know they are the tracks of beautiful, wild creatures who share the earth with men.

THE whiteness of ivory and of marble, the whiteness of a pearl and the whiteness of a cloud are not as the whiteness of snow.

Purer than all other purity, whiter than all other whiteness, it rests upon the breadth of the fields and the slope of the hills, and the utmost shining of the sun avails not against it.

From the tiny flakes are flung upward a million mocking glances at the impotent sun.

In the curve of a drift the light is cold and blue, but when the sun is sinking and shines with level, kindly rays, the curve of the drift is aglow with warm and golden light.

Noon, and a high, far sky of dazzling blue above a world of dazzling white.

Earth has no refuge and no hiding-place from the vast space, the deepening cold, the pitiless scrutiny of the sun.

I turn and on the whiteness of a western hill I see the shadow of a cloud, a near and tender, soft and gentle cloud.

The shadow on the western hill is as the shadow of a living and a gracious hand in the impersonal, unfeeling, and unbounded space.

THE sun has left the valley and rests with kind radiance upon the snowy hill-tops.

In the valley the blue light deepens and the shadows of the trees are lost in the shadow of the hills.

The cold, dark brook moves swiftly between ice-bordered banks, coating the bending twigs with its frozen breath.

Above the quick-flowing waters alders have hung their brown jewels, but the stream hastens on, unheeding their enticement.

Black spruce and pine are in the clear blue north, and delicate twigs of leafless trees are etched against the glowing western sky.

In the deep vault above, Orion and great Sirius wait the sun's going to glorify the winter night.

THE winter night is cold and still. Long shadows of the trees rest on the moon-whitened earth and a thousand little twinkling lights flash upward from the snow.

As I move forward the thousand lights go out and a thousand more flash forth.

The twinkling lights are a thousand messages from the absent sun sent by way of the moon.

IN the winter wind are many voices.

There is the soft sigh of weariness, the fitful sigh of restlessness, and the long sigh of the grief-stricken whose tears are past.

There is the low moan of pain and the shriek of agony; the dreary cry of the heart-broken and the wild cry of him whose reason is fled. There is the laughter of the scornful and the mockery of those who deride. There is the wail of a hurt child and the wail of a woman in travail.

In the winter wind are the voices of all cruelties and all pain, of all losses and all sorrow.

When the fierce gale comes from the north, the sighing and the moaning, the shrieking and

QUESTS

the wailing cease before the strong and mighty
breath of the Lord.

WHAT moment do the dreams of sleeping things
turn from the summer past, to that which is to
come?

When the wind is warm and the sun shines
from high in the heavens, is it known beneath
the snow?

There is no sign. The wood is silent. Bending
low I hear no sound and feel no breath.

When do the dreams of sleeping creatures
turn toward spring?

III
THE QUEST OF LOVE

THE QUEST OF LOVE

IF one says, I will seek Truth, shall he turn back?

If the path leads where he has not foreseen, shall he be confounded? If there is danger, shall he cower? If there is darkness, shall he be afraid?

If men cry, Not there, not there, shall he retrace his way? If that which was new and beautiful yesterday shall today be old and unlovely, shall he desist?

If he is led where he does not desire, shall he be dismayed?

If the goal is ever afar off, shall he cease from seeking?

I WILL not turn aside from the path that leads to my beloved. I will not heed the voices bidding me linger and seek other paths.

Fair are these paths; they offer beauty of flower and solace of shade. They are not devious. They lead not in steep ways where the limbs weary and the brain grows dizzy.

The goal of these paths is soon reached. I would go farther than their ending. My strength is greater than their distance and my hope wider than their opportunity.

QUESTS

My strength wanes, but renews itself. My hope dims, but it flames again. My strength does not lose itself in weakness nor my hope in disappointment.

My strength and my hope are boundless. I have chosen a path worthy of their use.

WHAT is the union of love?

I desire thy body only that I may possess thy spirit.

I desire thy spirit only that I may possess the infinite Spirit.

The desire of every creature is toward the Eternal.

ALL things were in my soul, but I could not find them. The burden of unfound things was heavy, and keen the hunger for the unknown.

I traveled the road of thought as far as men had gone. By the roadside lay the treasures they had found but they were not my treasures. I took a step farther on the road of thought; I strained the eyes of my soul beyond the eyes of my mind. But that which I sought was not revealed unto me.

I sought wise teachers and sat at the feet of sages. I studied the great books of the

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world and passed through the laboratories of science. I inquired of the rock and the lichen, and interrogated the wild creatures of earth and air. I opened my mind to the stars and my soul to invisible wisdom.

Still was the burden of unfound things heavy and keen the hunger for the unknown.

Then Love came and we ran through the fields like two children. The flowers held out their secrets to us as we passed and at night the stars divulged their mysteries. The history of the world was disclosed to me and the book of life lay open to my gaze.

The burden of the unfound was lifted and the darkness of the unknown was filled with promise.

THE measure of my love is the measure of my strength. So far as I love, so far am I strong, for love overcomes weakness.

The measure of my love is the measure of my light. So far as my love extends so far have I light, for love banishes darkness.

The measure of my love is the measure of my power. So far as I love so far am I powerful, for nothing can withstand love.

The measure of my love is the measure of my hope. So far as I love so far do I hope, for love discovers the secret grounds of hope.

The measure of my love is the measure of my liberty. So far as I love so far am I free, for love knows no bonds and freedom follows close in her footsteps.

SLEEP kept far from me and I stole out in the darkness that I might be near my beloved.

I passed through the shadowy trees until the light from her window shone upon me. I did not knock at her door. I was fearful of her displeasure, for she does not long for me, and my love is greater than hers.

In the light of her window I stood until her shadow darkened the light. The shadow of my love quieted my heart.

I traveled the dusty road and saw in the dust the footprints of my beloved. I might not walk beside her, but in the sand of the road I left my footprints where her feet had passed.

A Voice saith unto me: Why seekest thou the light of a single window, which shineth but for an hour and is then put out? Why cherishest thou the shadow of one who will shortly vanish, leaving no shadow? Why followest thou footprints in the dust which the wind and rain will destroy?

Behold, if thou seekest Me thou shalt have light which never goeth out, and My shadow will be ever upon thee. My footprints the rain

and wind will not hide. They shall be before thee wherever thou goest.

My heart was set upon my love and the Voice grew faint.

I WILL bathe my body, not with stagnant water from the bowl, but with living water from the ever-moving stream which renews itself at each instant.

Thus shall no foulness retouch my body. The foulness shall flow onward and lose itself. It shall not be seen or felt.

Only the water which is fresh and clear shall touch my flesh.

No stain of yesterday's garments shall be upon me. I will clothe my body with the fresh garments of today.

The swathings and wrappings of yesterday shall be left behind; they shall no more protect or encumber me.

There shall be for the new day clothing of white linen and of fine silk fresh from the loom. The smell of the flax and of the mulberry shall be upon it. In its texture will be the lightness of the breeze and the warmth of the sun. The softness of summer rain will dwell in its meshes and the light of stars and the strength of the earth be woven with its threads.

QUESTS

The water of my bath shall be fresh and the cloth of my garments new when I make ready to seek my beloved.

I SAID, My beloved is far from me. More than the distance of a world divides us and in a lifetime I may not find her.

Then is my beloved beside me. The benignity and calm of her presence are upon me.

I turn that I may see her face and greater than the distance of a world divides us.

I said, I will hasten. The wings of a bird shall be mine. As the speed of the eagle so shall my flight be.

Yet I can not overtake my beloved.

The winds become my steeds. Swifter than the cloud's flight is my going.

When I arrive my beloved is not there.

The speed of thought becomes mine. There is no time between my going and arriving.

As far as in the beginning, so far am I still from my beloved.

I AM weary. I will no longer seek my love.

The wide, soft wings of darkness fold themselves about me. I will hide my eyes in the feathers of the wings, and the lights of the world

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will vanish and the light of the stars and of the moon be shut out.

The long, deep wings of silence encompass me. They cover my ears and I no longer hear the noises of the world or the far off music of the stars.

In the darkness and silence I will rest and forget the search for my beloved. I will sleep.

THE wings of darkness stir; they part that light may enter.

The wings of silence move; they lift that sound may come in.

There is still no light and no sound. It is darker than midnight and more silent than the hours that follow. The darkness and the silence wait on the dawn.

I can not discern the coming of dawn. Darkness fades and disappears. Light adds itself to light and I know only the sum thereof. Silence is past; sounds of morning are in the air.

Brighter than sunlight is the face of my beloved. Sweeter than the song of birds is the sound of her voice bidding me follow her call.

TODAY thou art my friend and we will walk a little way together.

QUESTS

Between us is the fresh green grass where the morning dew lingers and delicate flowers are blooming.

Our feet shall keep to the paths that we may not brush the dew from the grass or crush the delicate flowers.

In the morning of this beautiful day we will walk a little way together.

LET an unspoken word be between us. There are no words so binding as those which are not spoken.

Let an unperformed act be before us. There are no acts so alluring as those which are unperformed.

Let an untrodden way be ever beyond us. There are no ways so beautiful as those which are untrodden.

I WOULD tell thee of my deep sadness, but when I am with thee I have no sadness and am only glad.

I would tell thee of my great loneliness, but when I am with thee I know not that loneliness is in the world.

I would tell thee of my tender longing, but when thou art near I have no longing and am satisfied.

THERE came another night when I went forth to be near my love. Cassiopeia was at the zenith and the stars rising in the east were not the stars of summer.

The screen of leaves which had hidden from me my love's window had fallen, but through the net-work of bare twigs I saw no light.

I went near and called, but there was no answer. I knocked and no one came. I looked in at the window; there was light, but it fell from without. There was a shadow, but it was the shadow of myself in pale moonlight on the floor.

I laid my hand on the house. It was cold. I knelt upon the doorstone and pressed my lips to the sill where steps last passed outward. It was as the mouth of the dead where there is no breath.

The dead, cold moon in the sky above was not more dead and cold than the house where my love had been.

I CAN not find my love. The birds which have sung of her loveliness are far away, and the leaves which whispered her name have fallen.

The wind blows cold from the north and there is no witness of her on the earth.

Where may I find thee, my love? The windows of thy house are dark and the walls are cold.

The snow has blotted out thy footprints in the road and there are no footprints in the snow.

Where shall I search for thee? Speak softly but a single word and though thou art a thousand miles away, the word will reach my ears.

THEY asked me, What is the name of thy love and where does she dwell? Who are her father and her mother, and has she a sister and a brother? Tell us the age of thy love, and the color of her eyes and of her hair. Does she tend a garden, or sweep a room, or study a book?

I was silent, for I could tell them none of these things.

They laughed in scorn and said, His love is no more known to him than to us. He has no love.

Then I went apart and was sorrowful, for their doubt was a keen sword in my heart.

Presently I returned and asked of them, Is the presence of my love known to you when she is absent? Do her eyes speak to you when her lips are silent? Is the touch of her hand as the alighting of a wild bird upon thy shoulder, and the glance of her eyes as stars in the night sky? Do the winds bring tidings of her and is

the descent of her spirit upon thine as the fall of warm rain on the dry earth? Is the remembrance of her as deep rest at the moment of terrible weariness, and the presence of her spirit a spur to swift and unending action? When she is with thee is the world no larger than thy meeting place, and when she departs dost thou know infinite space?

They went away in silence for they could tell me none of these things.

YESTERDAY my love became woman. She stood in a field gathering crimson berries. The wild bushes were higher than her head and white clematis grew upon them as upon a trellis.

The fruit had stained the woman's lips and fingers, and a single crimson blot was on the whiteness of her gown. Her eyes were blue as the chicory growing in the field, and in her dark hair she had twined a vine of the wild clematis.

She was young, and when she offered me a handful of the crimson fruit her hand trembled, and her eyes withdrew their gaze from mine.

With eagerness I ran forward to eat of the fruit and attain wisdom and understanding.

In the shadow of the high, wild bushes we ate the crimson fruit.

When I was alone the vine of wild clematis lay on the ground, limp and broken. The sky

had grayed and the wind was cold. Wisdom had not enlightened me nor had life unveiled its secret.

Weary and disheartened I lay in the field, until, far in the night, I heard the calm, chaste voice of my love calling me from afar.

THE heart of my love is like a great book. I hold it in my hand and count the pages. I say, It is long, but I can read it to the end; it is deep, but I can understand its meaning and penetrate the depth of its wisdom.

Lo! when I have read half its pages the number still to be read has not grown less, and when I have reached the end it is as the beginning.

That which I have understood is but a sentence from the foreword, and my penetration has gone no deeper than the leather of its binding.

I WAIT long to reach thy heart.

I wait as the sun waits for the unfolding of a rose.

I wait as the sun waited for the unfolding of the first flower upon earth.

I wait with the patience and faith of the sun which knows its shining will unfold all flowers.

WILL there be an end of my thoughts concerning thee?

When I have given words to all my thoughts, I say, I shall have no more; the fount of my mind is dry.

When I awake in the morning my mind is filled with new thoughts.

As a spring that has been drained renews itself by night and fills with fresh water, so is my mind renewed by night and filled with fresh thoughts of thee.

I ASK not, What if I had not known thee?

As well question the breeze, What if thou hadst not stirred the leaves? and the flower, What if thy sweetness had not drawn the bee?

As well ask of the sun, What if thy warmth had never touched the earth, nor thy light opened men's eyes?

WE part at night as familiar friends. The clasp of thy hand is close and tender and thine eyes are near and kind.

In the morning thou comest to me as from a far country.

QUESTS

Thy gaze is withdrawn as that of one who has beheld a great mystery, and the tones of thy voice are deep with the memory of experiences not to be disclosed.

In the morning I know thee not.

No, I will not return, not for a word or touch of hand or lips.

We said good-night and though we stood apart, heaven was revealed to me within thine eyes as thy sweet soul bent from its height to mine.

No, I will not return, lest I should find thee less, and for a word, or touch of hand and lips, lose the abiding of thy soul in mine.

I WAKE at night breathless with thy presence. Thine eyes are far off as stars. Thy soul is near as darkness, and thy hand is on my heart.

I DARE not call thee by thy name. They speak thy name and thou turnest to right and left to meet their smiles and words. Thou answerest one and another according to their asking, and art many women in the space of a day.

If I should speak thy name but once thy masks and shields would drop. A self that men have

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never seen would look from out thine eyes, and even I who called would fall back in amaze and awe.

I dare not speak thy name, lest calling, I draw the spirit from out thy body and they call thee dead.

I WILL not speak thy name in the cities and the towns. I will not profane thy name in the crowded and noisy places of earth.

I will speak thy name in the open country, in the silent woods and on the hill-side.

The sky and the mountains will receive thy name, and the grass and trees will understand.

I will speak thy name, and the birds will listen and the flowers nod in the breeze.

I will speak thy name and all that is beautiful will hear and make reply.

I STAND alone at the gate of the field as the light of the moon grows brighter and the evening wind rises.

The noises of the night are about me; I hear the song of the pines and the long surge of the forest leaves like the surge of the sea. The little leaves of the poplar rustle and a dying leaf falls and is still.

QUESTS

The noises of the night grow louder and die away; they rise and sink into quietness.

I listen to hear, beyond the sounds of the night, another sound. It is swift and light and is afar off. It draws near and does not die away. It is the sound of thy footsteps bringing thee to me.

I WILL seek my love at morning when the heaviness of sleep lingers in her eyes as night-shadows in the forest where birds are singing and the ferns are wet with dew.

I will seek her at noon when the full stream of tasks flows about her and I can not find her spirit for the multitude of her thoughts.

I will go to her at eventide when her eyes are on the sunset and her thoughts return to me.

I will be near her at night when her lips and her thoughts are silent and only her spirit is awake to meet mine in the darkness.

THEY have lighted the lamp and closed the outer door. They have made in the sea of darkness a tiny island of light and in the ocean of night a dry place above the waters.

The window of thy chamber is open and the cool night air receives thy breath. The darkness which hides from me the road and the wall be-

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yond, touches thine eyelids and rests upon thy lips.
Thy spirit flows out and mingles with the night.

They have lighted the lamp and closed the
outer door. They have made in the ocean of
thy presence a little space where thou are not.

How shall I reach thee?

Though I overtake thee at last and hold thee
in my arms, though I break down the wall of thy
flesh and enter the temple of thy body, still
have I not reached thee.

There is no light in the temple and no fire on
the altar. Thou art not there.

The music which I heard from without is
silenced and the sweetness of incense has died
on the air.

Verily, the seeking of thy soul is a long quest.

I WILL find a secret path to thy heart.

I will not take the highway where many
travelers move toward the goal. The hands of
the travelers are filled with tributes and the
eyes of each gaze unkindly upon his fellows.

I will not mingle with those who openly seek
thy heart.

I will find a little hidden path which even thou
canst not see. Thou wilt not hear the sound of
my footsteps or catch a glimpse of my form, but
one day before thou hast dreamed of my coming
thou wilt find me in thy heart.

QUESTS

THE way is long to thy heart. The way is as long as to the farthest land. It is as long as to the farthest star.

If it were not thy heart which I seek I should be weary; my feet would falter and my courage fail.

The greatness of my hope upholds me, for it is thy heart which I seek.

I KNOW thou hast passed this way for the wind is warm and gentle as soft hands upon my face.

I know thou hast passed this way for the brook is singing a low song caught from thy voice.

I know thou hast passed this way for the shade of young leaves upon the ground is restful as thy presence.

I know thou hast passed this way for where thy feet have pressed white violets are opening.

It is a little path in the wood. Sunlight drops among the leaves, and ferns brush my garments as I pass. A bird flies low across my way, and a wild flower holds out its beauty.

It is a little path in the wood, and it leads to thee.

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It is a wide street in a great city. Numberless feet pass that way and the roll of wheels is unceasing. The business of a world is transacted along its borders, and from it men depart for far lands by way of the sea.

It is a wide street in a great city, and it leads to thee.

It is a way I do not know. I can not tell if it is wide or narrow, leading east or northward, into darkness or to light. All feet shall pass that way and cries of lamentation are heard at its entrance.

It is an unknown way, but I know it leads to thee.

THOU hast many hopes. One hope thou hast not, the hope of seeing thee.

Thou hast many blessings. One blessing thou hast not, the blessing of knowing thee.

Thou hast many joys. One joy thou hast not, the joy of loving thee.

I DID not know thee in thy childhood, but I know thy childhood was fair and beautiful.

Thy future is hidden even from thyself, but I know thy future will be fair and beautiful.

I see thee for a moment, and in that moment I discern thy childhood and thine immortality.

QUESTS

SMILE, my loved one, for if thou dost not smile the faces of the flowers are dull and the sun's light grows dim.

Be kind, for if thy kindness fails the whole great world is alien and kindness itself no longer lives.

Draw near, my love, for if thou drawest not near, though earth crowds close, I am alone as in the empty space beyond the stars.

THY words are beautiful and gracious, and the touch of thy hand is tender and kind.

Let thy lips be silent that thy heart may speak to me. Withhold thy hand that thy soul may move toward mine.

If thy heart speaks but a simple word, and thy soul but turns toward mine, I shall be content.

MY love, thou hast gone with me but a little way, yet thou hast opened to me the path which has no ending.

Of thy store of knowledge thou hast imparted to me but a handful, yet thou hast led me to the verge of infinite wisdom.

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Thou hast bestowed upon me but a fraction of thy love, yet thou hast brought me to the unmeasured tenderness beyond thyself.

As a smouldering log breaks into clear flame at a breath of wind, so my heart has broken into a bright flame of love at thine approach.

The music of my life was harsh and discordant until the noble music of thy life fell upon my ear. Then the discord of my life resolved to deep harmony.

The waters of my life were muddy and turbulent until they reached the clear stream of thy life. Then the waters of my life were purified and calmed.

My heart is as a harp which thou, the wind, in passing, played upon, and left with heavenly melody vibrant on its strings.

My beloved, thou art greater than thyself.

Thy self is very little. It moves about in a small space and is wearied with little tasks. It laughs at simple things and wastes its words upon trifles. It is bounded by the walls of a house and is the servant of a day.

Thy soul is very great. It inhabits large spaces and is at leisure from the labor of the world. It is untouched in the midst of distractions and its smile is for serene and beautiful

things. The walls of a house do not contain it and it knows not days nor years.

Thy soul is greater than thy self, my beloved.

My love, thou hast many dwelling-places, for thou hast wandered far over the earth and made thine abode in many hearts.

There are dwelling-places as the tents of a night, and wayside houses of rest and refreshment where thou hast paused for an hour.

There are great and rugged castles whose lords are gracious unto thee, and homes of little children where thou hast played in the sunshine.

There are dim and lonely dwellings where thou hast let in light, and houses of mirth and gladness where thou art joyful and light of heart.

There are dwelling-places which will shelter thee all the days of thy life on earth, and abodes whose outer hall thou canst not pass.

Thine abode in my life is invisible and unknown of men. It will endure beyond earth and time.

THE measure of my love thou canst not know.

As the sand upon the shore receives a wave of the mighty sea, so receivest thou my love.

As a little plant stands in the full glory of the sun and takes of light and heat according to its need, so takest thou my love. The plant will die and the glory of the sun fall upon its withered

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stalk. The sun shall one day shine upon the place where it has been.

Thou canst not make return. Though thou yieldest mind, body, breath, and soul, still dost thou not return my love.

Only the Power beyond thyself can make return.

STRANGE and marvelous is the power given into thy keeping.

There is no fence about the wide prairie, but thou art a little gate opening into its vastness.

The mighty ocean bears the ships of the world, but thou, in the midst of the sea, art a little stream bearing my ship.

The brightness of the sun illumines the whole earth, but thou, in the midst of the brightness, art a little candle enabling me to see the light.

THOU art enthroned within my life beyond the reach of praise or blame. No word of all that men may say reaches the high and sacred place wherein thou art enshrined.

Though they shout with adulation, thou art not greater in my eyes. Though they utter imprecations, yet art thou not less to me.

Fair and beautiful is thy life within my soul. I look up to thee as to mountain summits whose

QUESTS

whiteness the heat and defilement of earth may not touch.

THE light of the full moon shines upon the wall and the room is filled with soft radiance.

Hours pass and the light on the wall grows dim. The light of the moon is not overtaken by darkness, but by a greater light. It is the dawn of day and all the wall is light.

The light of thy life shines on the wall of my soul and my soul is filled with its brightness.

Years pass and the light of thy life grows dim. There is a moment when it merges in the light of a vaster Life and I can not tell the one from the other.

The greater light waxes and I know that the glory of thy life was the reflection of a greater glory beyond thyself.

I KNOW not where the outer boundaries of thy life are set.

Shoreward a wall is built about thy self that thy fellows may not pass. Outward and seaward no bounds are visible. Thy being merges in the vaster being, and the light of stars sends back thy glance.

Thy low voice is mingled with the call of the Eternal, and the journey toward the infinite goal is a journey toward thyself.

IV
THE QUEST OF LIFE

THE QUEST OF LIFE

GREAT is the mystery of woman. From her body comes forth the generations of men, and to the life of earth there is no other entrance.

Tree and plant bring forth after their kind, and bird and animal bear according to their nature. The woman brings forth after her kind; but through the open door there enters, with the flesh and blood, the unforeseen and unknown.

The soul of man slips in with the body, and the door may give entrance to a greater guest.

Is the issue of my body but a single life? Is the fruit of my travail but one puny man? Shall my desire attain but this slight end?

I am the earth mother. All that has life I bear.

I am pregnant with the life of seeds; with the life of the seed of grass and the seed of the great oak, with the life of the little spores of moss and fern, and the fine seed of the orchid.

The gnat and the spider I bear, and the lizard and toad are my offspring. The life of the bird and butterfly are in my womb and at my breasts feed the wolf and the lion. I give suck to the whale, and the deer and elephant I nourish.

QUESTS

The generations of men are in my keeping,
for I am the door to the life of the world.

I AWAIT the moment when my beloved shall
say to me, Let us go out alone, together, in the
night.

For this was I born. The years of my life
have brought me to this hour. They depart
from my presence as servants which have finished
their work. Henceforth I live beyond the years.

The sum of the desire of all living things does
not exceed my desire for thee, my beloved. The
trees make of the winds their messengers and the
flowers send forth the bee and the butterfly on
their errands of love. The fluttering moth
draws her mate from afar, and the wild beast
calls in the forest. Man lays at the feet of his
love a crown and a kingdom, and woman follows
her desire though the high plains resound with
the battle-din of vast armies.

Ocean calls to river, and star and sun yield
to their bonds across unlighted space.

So great is my desire for thee, my beloved.

The stream of life breaks against its barriers.
I await thy coming that the gates of my body
may be opened for the passing of the stream of
life.

The stream is deep and mighty. It bears upon
its waters the bodies and souls of coming men.

The place of its rising is secret and the goal of its waters hidden. The sound of its flowing is sweet to my ears. In it is all the music of the earth. The brightness of its waters gladdens my eyes. In them is all the beauty of the world.

I await thy coming, my beloved, that the gates of my body may be opened for the passing of the stream of life.

I WAITED for my love upon the mountain summit where the lone bird calls and the distant peak draws near in the clear air.

I lay in a hollow of the rock where the rain and sun had brought forth the lichen and the white sandwort blossomed alone.

My love came from the east and the light of the morning star and of the rising sun was upon him. Over a shining sea of white cloud he came. The cloud filled the valley and hid the world below.

The strong voice of my love summoned me and I ran to meet him. When he laid his hand upon me I was glad. His breath was on my face as the mountain wind upon the fir trees, and the mist rose and covered us until we were hidden from the morning star and the rising sun.

Alone, upon the mountain summit, the boundaries of our lives were broken and we entered into the life of the earth and of the heavens.

QUESTS

No place was alien to us and no time unknown. No life from the least to the greatest was a stranger and the power which is without waning was manifest unto us.

When we awakened the sun was high and the mist had vanished. The naked world lay below us. In the valley were tasks and task-masters, and the dust of labor and the smoke of battle rose toward the mountain summit.

THAT which I conceived upon the mountain will descend to earth.

The Child is not to be of this world. He shall come and go, and come again, as the light of the sun.

Men will lift their eyes from their toil and beholding the beauty of his face, shall be joyful. Children and the young in heart shall hasten to greet him and the aged and the mourner will stand no longer in the shadow of the grave.

The Child shall be to men as the bearer of tidings from another world.

V
THE ETERNAL QUEST

THE ETERNAL QUEST

HATH all been said of old? Hath all been revealed? Is there aught more to be told concerning the Ruler of the earth and the heavens?

Has Being gained in depth and height? Has the Eternal enlarged His borders? Has He gained new attributes and power?

Shall the words that have been spoken of the Eternal continually satisfy men? Has the voice of Truth spoken and passed into silence as the voice of a bird whose time of singing is past?

Shall men henceforth hear only the echo of the voice of Truth?

GREAT words have been spoken of Thee, my God.

Thou art greater than all the words spoken of Thee.

The imagination of man has pictured Thee in the heavens, marvelous in power and wisdom.

Thy power and wisdom exceed the imagination of man.

The trust of man has gone out to Thee and the faith of man is in Thy keeping.

Thy worth and Thy faithfulness are beyond the trust and faith of man.

QUESTS

So far as space exceeds the little space man knows, so far dost Thou exceed man's thought of Thee, my God.

Dost Thou uphold to the end? Is Thy mercy upon them that serve the hour and the day, and Thy care withdrawn from him who heeds a call from beyond the present and the near?

Dost Thou confound the keen of ear and hungry of soul, and bring to confusion him whose eyes are upon a far off goal?

Dost Thou prepare Thy servant as for an arduous task, and give the task to another who is to come?

Is my hope illusion and my vision Thy deception?

ART Thou concerned with loss? Art Thou pitiful?

Dost Thou mourn the death of a man, or sorrow at the maiming of a child?

Is the virtue of a woman Thy care, and the integrity of a soul Thy regard?

Art Thou desolate at the burning of a city, and cast down at the fall of a nation?

Thou who art All knoweth no loss. Thou who art Life knoweth no death. Thou who art Virtue knoweth no departure from virtue, and Thou who art Upright knoweth no falling.

Thou weapest not, neither dost Thou sorrow,
for from Thee nothing can be taken away, and
that which is Thine can not be destroyed.

A VOICE came to me, saying: Speak my Word.

I answered, Thy Word is great and terrible.
It is too great for the men of earth; it will awe
and affright them. Hearing, they will leave
their tasks that they may listen, and the work
of the world will cease.

The Voice spoke, saying: Does the bird
cease its singing lest the clearness of its song
entrance men, or the flower withhold its fragrance
that they be not overpowered by its sweetness?
Does the lightning sheathe its sword or the wind
restrain its violence? Does the sun temper its
heat? Do the stars veil their light?

My Word shall visit the earth as the song of
birds and as the fragrance of a flower. It will
come as the shaft of lightning and as the mighty
wind. It will descend as the fierce heat of the
sun and fall as the faint light of stars.

Men heed the bird and the flower, and are
blind to their beauty. The lightning smites the
dead tree and the living flesh. The wind plays
with a blossom and lays low a city. The heat
of the sun unfolds a plant from the seed and
parches the grass of a field. The stars of night
console and they terrify.

My Word shall weaken and strengthen men. It will smite and heal; confound and enlighten; curse and bless.

Lo, my Word shall be heeded and it shall pass unheard. It will smite the dead and the living; it will build up and lay low. It will come with playfulness and gentleness and approach with terrible might. It will bestow life and bring to death. It will console and terrify.

Men will turn from their labor that they may listen. Some will return to their tasks and others will forget their work and return no more.

In manifold ways will the world receive my Word.

Speak thou as it is commanded thee.

I ASKED, What shall I say unto men? Tell me thy Word quickly that I may speak and the world may hear.

I listened, but I heard only the wind as it passed and when the wind was still, the song of a little bird.

Again I cried, Speak unto me thy Word.

I listened, and I heard the tramping of many feet and the murmur of many voices. I heard sounds of joy and sounds of mourning; the call to prayer and the battle-cry of nations at war.

Once more I cried, Give unto me thy Word as thou hast promised.

THE ETERNAL QUEST

I listened and I heard no sound. The silence grew until the silence itself was a Voice, and the Voice spoke unto me.

I AM the Height above the height of aspiration and the Depth below the depth of understanding.

I am the Answer to the unanswerable, and the Solution of the unsolvable.

I am the Goal beyond striving, and the End beyond attainment.

I am the Thought beyond thinking, and the Beauty beyond the manifestations of beauty.

I am the Light beyond darkness, and the Darkness beyond light.

I am the Strength beyond weakness, and the Wholeness beyond that which is broken.

I am the Purpose enclosing all purposes, and the Effort including all efforts.

I am the End of all beginnings, and the Beginning of all ends.

I am Old in the presence of the new, and New in the presence of that which is old.

I am the Mystery beyond the known, and the Truth beyond the unknown.

I am the Certainty beyond hope, and the Love beyond yearning.

I am that which Is, beyond that which is not.

My Word has become a toy and plaything among men; they have tossed it to and fro and broken it in pieces to find its meaning. They have held it to the light to see whereof it is made. They have said, How beautiful is thy Word, O my God!

My people have become as those who build reservoirs above their fields to catch the rain. When the rain has come they have rejoiced at the deep water and given thanks that it was kept from the soil below, that they might play in its limpid brightness.

Behold! the water of my Word shall break through their reservoirs of thought. It shall cease to be a toy and plaything and shall run with power over the earth. The thirsty land shall be refreshed and its fruitage increased.

Men shall no longer shield themselves from the sword of my Word. They shall feel the keenness of its naked blade and know the strength of its hilt. They shall rejoice and be purified through the probing of their hearts.

WHERE seekest thou Me, O man? Am I in that which is past? Am I in that which is dead? Am I in that which repeats itself?

THE ETERNAL QUEST

I am in the present moment, and when the moment is past I am in that moment which is present.

Thou searchest for Me in vain among the dead. Where I have been I am not now, and where I am thou shalt find Me not again.

I am the ever-new. The act which comes forth from My hand shall repeat itself as waves in the wake of a ship repeat themselves in the waters of the ocean. I am as the ship which has moved on, leaving in its track new waves.

MEN do many things in remembrance of Me.

Lo! I ask them to remember Me no more. I will blot out their remembrance for I dwell no longer in the past.

I have left the old time and dwell now in the present. He who would remember Me looks backward where I am not.

Remember Me no more, ye sons of earth, for My presence is greater than your remembrance of Me.

I AM as one who passes swiftly and does not return.

Shall the plow enter again the furrow it has made in the field? Does the voice of the singer return to the record of itself and the hand retrace the words it has written?

The plow passes on to unbroken ground; the voice of the singer is heard in a new song, and the hand of the writer forms new words.

I am as one who makes a garment and casts it aside. I am as one who scatters seed and stays not for the harvest. I am as one who builds a temple and lingers not within its walls. I am as one who prepares a feast and sits not at the table.

Continually I flee, and no work of My hand shall restrain Me. My ships do not bear Me nor My roofs shelter Me. The sun gives Me not light and heat, nor does the earth uphold My feet. Neither am I contained within My truth or revealed by My word.

Behind Me are all the works and thoughts of men and I am beyond all that I have formed or spoken.

If a man walk with Me shall it be as if he walked with his fellows?

Is My pace as the pace of men? Do I hasten when they hasten and pause where they pause?

Of old I have walked with men. I have lingered where they heaped flowers upon their graves and I have stayed to comfort those who mourned.

I have conferred with the doubter and waited patiently for the slow of faith. I have stooped

to the weak and turned aside to meet him who had sinned. I have watched little children at their play and entered into the manifold concerns of earth.

Lo! now I move swiftly in the heavens and walk no longer with men.

He who would walk with Me must linger not by a grave nor seek repose for weariness. He shall not nurse his sorrow or magnify his sin. He shall drop pain as a cast-off garment and lose his weakness in My strength.

Lo! now I move swiftly in the heavens and walk no longer with men. I wait not for the doubter or for the slow of faith. I stoop not to the weak and turn not aside to meet the sinner. I have left the little children and My hand is no longer in the concerns of earth.

If a man walk with Me it shall not be as if he walked with his fellows. I move swiftly in the heavens and he who would walk with Me must linger not, but hasten, lest I pass beyond his sight.

I HAVE sent My people forth to many tasks and adventures;—one to build a bridge and one to write a book; one to dig in the earth and one to fly in the air; one to till the soil, and one to sail the sea. There is commerce and there is the teaching of youth. There is conquering

of nations, and there is resisting. There are tasks and adventures without number.

My people have grown vain in their hearts. They have said: See the greatness of our works. Behold! we do all things. The sea has become our servant and the stars our guides. Our works have become as the works of Nature. Lo! they exceed the works of Nature. Even he who wields the hoe and she who uses the broom is exalted.

Behold, I call My people from their tasks as a mother calls her children from their play. I call them from the making of nations and from the building of toy houses. I call them from the sailing of air-ships and from the sailing of kites. I call them from their philosophies and their poems, from their cathedrals and their prisons, from their battle-fields and their golf courses. I call them from all their tasks and adventures.

I heed not the demur of him who would finish his work. At My call the tool must drop and the top cease its spinning. The statue of marble is but half chiseled and the garment but a quarter wrought. The runner has not reached his goal and the poet has not found words for his thought.

As a mother calls her children from their play, so call I My people from their work. The night comes on. My people sleep. I, only, am awake in the darkness as a mother who gathers up the toys and prepares for a new day.

I WILL give unto My people rest.

The rest which I will give shall be not as the rest of quiet feet and of a body at ease, nor as the rest of folded hands and of closed eyes. Neither shall it be as the rest of the unseeking mind and the satisfied heart.

My rest is not as the rest of those who travel by day the worn and easy paths and at night return to the roof which sheltered them in childhood.

The feet of those who know My rest shall never pause; their eyes shall not close nor their hands be folded. They shall pass from hunger to hunger and shall never cease from searching.

They will travel by day the steep and unworn paths of the future and at night no roof will hide from them the stars.

The way that is past shall close behind them that they may not return, and continually before them will open the way which is new.

THE ways that are known are many.

When men follow the ways that are known they walk assured and confident, though the ways are lonely and difficult. In the darkest path there is witness of those who have passed, and the voices of those who have gone that way linger in the silence.

QUESTS

Are there before us unknown ways? Dost Thou call to paths where no feet have trod?

Dost Thou command me to enter the wilderness from whence my report will not be believed nor my word trusted?

Is Thy call from beyond the frontier where Thy pioneers have pitched their tents and Thy scouts are at ease?

Shall I not tell of the beauty of the land that is found and describe the ways that men have discovered?

The land that is found is known to few and the ways that men have discovered are little trod.

Why callest Thou to ways that are strange and new when Thy people are weary with the journey and would rest?

THY call is from afar and to a far land.

If Thy call had been to a goal close at hand I could have attained rest in my youth. All the years of my life would not have been given to striving and my nights to listening for Thy call. I should have found peace in friendship and joy in the love of kin. The tasks of a day would have sufficed for my hands and the pleasures of a day would have filled my thoughts. A house would have been my shelter and the world my dwelling-place.

Behold! Thou hast called me from afar to a goal I know not. Thou hast given me no rest save in striving and in my sleep thou still urgest me.

Thou hast broken the bonds of friendship and severed me from kindred. When the work of the day is finished Thy task rises before me in the darkness, and the pleasures of a day are forgotten in the hope of Thy promised joy.

Thou hast laid low the walls of my house, and the world has become as the stopping-place of a day.

Thy call is from afar and to a goal I know not.

MEN have found Thee in the rock and in the tree; in bird and animal, and within the human heart.

They have found Thee in the sky and in the ocean, in the stars and sun, and in the mighty wind.

Thou hast descended to earth as a dove and as the rain which watereth the grass. Thou hast led men by a pillar of fire, and Thou hast spoken from the flaming bush and from the mount that might not be touched.

I would find Thee where Thou art not manifest. I would find Thee where there is no sound nor light nor substance. I would find Thee where there is nothing but Thyself.

QUESTS

I would see Thee where Thou art not visible,
and hear Thee where Thou makest no sound.

I would find Thee where there is nothing but
Thyself.

I WOULD not be always as one who stands where
Thou hast passed.

I would stand where Thou art passing that I
may see Thy face.

I would not be always as one who hears the
words Thou hast spoken.

I would hear Thy voice and know the words
Thou art speaking.

I would not be always as one who knows Thou
hast visited the earth.

I would know when Thou art here that I
may touch the hem of Thy garment.

IN my soul is the sound of many voices. They
are little voices and they speak of little things.

The sound of the many little voices is so loud
that I can not hear Thy voice. Thy voice is
great and it speaks of great things.

I would silence the many little voices that I
may hear Thy great voice speaking alone.

WHEN I was a child I was fearful of many things.
High in an elm tree worms had spun them a

nest about the slender twigs. I ran quickly past the tree on my way to school, for the nest was in the likeness of a little old woman and her sharp eyes looked down upon me. In my bed I turned my back upon a tall, draped figure, for if I turned my back the figure was no longer there.

In my youth the noises of the night affrighted me, and I locked my door against the presences without. The evil in the world became as a many-headed monster ready to assail me and I trembled and was dismayed at the presence of life.

Then a Voice spoke to me from out the darkness, saying: Have no fear. I am Master in this world and of nothing may it be said, It is greater than I.

One day thou shalt stand with Me at the tempest's heart when the lightnings dart from My hand and the swift, strong winds depart. Thou shalt descend with Me to the dungeons of disease where sickness is bred and the pestilence which devastates the earth. Thou shalt bare thy breast to the murderer's knife and thy treasure shall be upon the high-road where thieves pass in the night. Thou shalt pass unscathed through the den of the harlot and in the presence of the libertine thou shalt remain pure.

No demon of the mind's fancy shall assail thee, and the noises of the night shall be as precious secrets to thine ears.

QUESTS

Thou shalt laugh at mourning and mock at death, for I am Master in this world and of nothing may it be said, It is greater than I.

My life is set to the rhythm of eternity. Its rhythm is not as that of the lives of men. It is slower than the rhythm of their lives. When men run swiftly after many things, when they hasten with shouts toward their goals, I am quiet and the pulse of my life is unstirred.

The rhythm of my life is quicker than that of the lives of men. When they have ceased their running and sit by the evening fire, when sleep is upon them and the pulse of their life is slow, my soul moves with terrible swiftness toward a goal beyond the farthest star.

THE years of my life yet to be lived are behind me. I look back upon all the years of my life.

The journey from youth to the grave is very short. It is accomplished. I have seen my body fall and the earth cover it.

I have watched the little candle of my life go out and the great world is no less light. I hear no more the sound of my voice, but there are no less voices in the world.

I have seen my life pass away as a cloud, and I stand in the clear shining of the sun.

THE youth of the world is renewed daily by the coming of little children. They rise among the failing and the aged as fresh growths in an ancient and dying forest. Continually they replace that which is old.

The little children at length grow old and are weary. Their flesh fails and they pass away.

Is there that which is continually new? Is there that which grows not old and passes not away?

Behold! Thou art younger than a new-born child and more new than a day at its dawning.

When the earth shall be no more Thine age will be no greater than when the earth was not.

Birth, dawn, and spring, and hope and love, are but veiled witnesses to Thine eternal youth.

LIFE has many duties to be performed, and one duty speaks to one man and another duty to another man.

The duty which has spoken to me is not as those which have spoken to other men.

It is not the strong and noble duty of a father, or the gentle and tender duty of a mother. It is not the duty of one who ministers to suffering and assuages sorrow. It is not the duty of one who moves among his fellows to raise and bless

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them. It is not the duty of friend or servant, sister or lover.

The duty which has spoken to me is the duty of one who is called apart to be silent and to listen.

It is the duty of one who is commanded to be separate from the concerns of men that he may learn of the concerns beyond men.

It is the duty of one who is commanded to turn aside from the known and traveled ways, and enter upon the ways that are untrodden and unknown.

As a musician tunes the strings of his instrument, so hast Thou tuned my spirit to Thy use.

The bow of Thy testing has been drawn a thousand times and Thy keen ear has listened all the years of my life for its perfect tune.

I shrank from the drawing of Thy bow. I rebelled against the fineness of Thine ear. I cried out, It is enough; play upon Thine instrument as it is, lest Thou strain its strings to breaking.

But Thou desisted not.

There came a day when Thine instrument was in tune with the beauty of the world. The forest and the cloud broke into music upon its strings and the sea and stars gave forth their melody. There came a day when it sang of the longing of human hearts and of the greatness and mystery of love. There came a day when from

its upper strings was drawn a clear, faint strain of the music of eternity.

I ASKED that I might be shown the Spirit of the West and of the East, and visions were granted me.

I saw darkness, deeper than the darkness of night. From the darkness came a million lights and darkness was no more. There was silence, deeper than the silence of night. From the silence a million sounds were born and there was an end of silence.

I saw a vast and shapeless mass break into countless forms. I saw a beam of pure white light dissolve into countless colors. A lichen grew upon a rock, and the earth was green with forests and sweet with flowers. Life stirred in a pool, and the earth and air bred myriad crawling, flying, leaping things.

A creature walked upright, and in the course of ages nations were born. The hand of man formed many things and in his brain were many thoughts. Man set himself to lengthen, divide, and multiply the threads of life. He said: Let us increase, improve, and strengthen Man. Let us multiply his works and his thoughts. Let us give him dominion and power.

Thus saw I the Spirit of the West.

QUESTS

I saw a man fall and die. I saw war and pestilence sweep the earth. I saw a nation blotted out and a people become no more.

The green of the forests turned to brown and the grass withered. Over all the earth there was no living thing. I saw the thousand tints of the rainbow withdrawn into a pure white beam of light. Form sank to formlessness; sound returned to silence and light to the abyss of darkness. The threads of life were gathered into one strand and the strand broke.

All that had been was as if it were not.

Then a Voice spoke, saying: All that has been came forth from Me and returns. I have power to give and to withdraw, to form and reform. My power and dominion exceed the power and dominion of man. They shall last forever.

Thus saw I the Spirit of the East.

I SAW the nations of the earth at war. Months grew to years, and the long battle line wavered from east to west and back again.

The dead lay upon the ground like fallen fruit which men have not time to gather and which turns to decay.

I heard the armies of the east and of the west praying for victory, and the favor of their gods visited them and was withdrawn.

THE ETERNAL QUEST

Then a Voice spoke from the smoke above the battle-field, saying: I am greater than thy god or the god of thine enemy. The victory which is to come shall be not thy victory nor the victory of thine enemy. It shall be My victory, for I am the God of thine enemy and of thyself, and My victory shall be for all men and all nations.

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